

Minutes of Community Workgroup Meeting #7
April 24, 2001
EHOVE Career Center

The meeting began at 7 PM. Present were the following Workgroup members: John Blakeman, Janet Bohne, Bob Speers, Deborah Alex –Saunders, Rick Graham, John McFadden, Dave Stein and Stan Taylor. [The latter five members were attending their first meeting, having accepted NASA's recent invitation to join]. The following NASA staff were in attendance: Tim Polich, Decommissioning Project Manager; Sally Harrington, Public Affairs Specialist; Keith Peecook, Senior Project Engineer; Mike Blotzer, Chief, Environmental Management Office; Manny Dominguez, Chief, Safety Office; and Bill Wessel, Director, Office of Safety and Assurance Technology. Also present were: Wes Watson, Elizabeth Carver and Gary Meden of the US Army Corps of Engineers; Steve Reutcke of Montgomery Watson; Mike Quintin and Dave Forth of SAIC; Hank Bayes, Kurt Gaber and Brian Moyers of Argonne National Laboratories; and Susan Santos and Michael Morgan of FOCUS GROUP.

Tim Polich began the meeting by welcoming people and then introducing the Federal Sector team and contractors who will be involved in decommissioning, noting that "all my positions are pretty much filled." He gave a brief update on the status of the Decommissioning Plan, noting that NASA had responded to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Requests for Additional Information (RAI's) by the end of March, as requested. The RAI's and the revised Decommissioning Plan were distributed in CD ROM form to Workgroup members in attendance and Susan Santos noted that both CD ROM and hard copies of the documents will be available to the public at the Community Information Bank at the BGSU Firelands library.

Worker Safety

Steve Reutcke from Montgomery Watson followed with a presentation on worker safety, during which he reinforced NASA's top priority: the safety of the public, decommissioning workers and the environment. He stressed what he termed "the three A's...Attitude, Awareness and Action." The attitude, he said, was that "each of us must have concern for our own safety and the safety of others." Awareness referred to recognizing and identifying "the hazards around us and....the means to eliminate or control them." Attitude and awareness are combined "to take the necessary action to prevent unsafe acts and unsafe conditions from occurring." He reported that, in March, the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) held a "Baseline Walkthrough" of the Plum Brook Station Reactor Facility, in which NASA, the Army Corps and Montgomery Watson participated. The walkthrough identified issues to be addressed in preparing for decommissioning. He then showed and discussed a series of slides, which gave an overview of the project teams' approach to safety.

Next, Workgroup members accepted the minutes from the January meeting and Susan Santos and Sally Harrington went through the agenda for the April meeting and the information packet that each member received. The packet included the CD ROM version of the revised Decommissioning Plan, fact sheets on decommissioning, a postcard/magnet (mailed to 1,400 Erie County residents in February) and a one-page description of the Workgroup Purpose and Objectives. Sally reviewed and discussed the purpose and objectives to ensure that all new members understood them. Susan asked whether the group would concur with them, to which all members agreed. Sally also noted that the Workgroup was shifting emphasis from educating and informing to also ensuring that Workgroup members disseminated the information to the broader community. Susan reinforced the need for the Workgroup to pass decommissioning information on to the public and referred to “the various ways (for the public) to find information firsthand.”

Pre-Decommissioning

Keith Peecook went through a presentation on Pre-Decommissioning activities, which will commence in June. He stressed that pre-decommissioning work is separate from NASA’s plan for decommissioning the Reactor Facility and involves work that can be carried out under NASA’s existing license with the NRC. Keith described the benefits and rationale for pre-decommissioning activities, which will help NASA to prepare for the actual decommissioning. Keith’s presentation (which was handed out at the meeting) described the schedule and timing of activities. Work will begin in June and consist of cleaning out loose equipment from the facility, restoring cranes, doors and other systems for use in the decommissioning and collecting and inventorying items of possible historical value. He also explained what the process will **not** involve; namely, any cutting or disassembly of equipment, demolition or heavy work.

Workgroup member John Blakeman asked Keith how much material would be removed during pre-decommissioning, and whether the work crew has “done this before.” Keith said three or four truckloads would be involved and assured John that the crew has the experience, adding that the workers would also receive “site specific training....throughout the project.” Keith noted that pre-decommissioning work will involve two areas: the former Hot Cells (where pieces of equipment from experiments were kept) and the reactor areas known as Hot Dry Storage. He also emphasized that all of the waste to be transported will be low-level, dry, solid waste.

One truckload of loose equipment from the Hot Cells will be put in containers, known as B-25 boxes, that will be placed on a flatbed truck for shipment in late June. The shipment will be sent out of Plum Brook Station (PBS) through the Scheid Road gate, then south on US 250 and onto the Ohio Turnpike - and eventually to the Alaron waste reprocessing facility in Pennsylvania. There, the waste will undergo “volume reduction and reclamation,” resulting in a smaller amount of waste (and a lower cost) to be shipped to the Envirocare facility in Utah for final disposal. The Hot Dry Storage pre-decommissioning work will take place later in the summer, which will result in up to

three truckloads of low, level solid radioactive waste. Most of this will again be Class A waste, which will be shipped in B-25 boxes. One shipment of Class B low-level waste will be transported in a cask. That shipment will include the old beryllium reflector plates from the Hot Dry Storage area. The cask will consist of two layers of steel – each 2” thick – with 6” of lead in between. The Class A shipment(s) will follow the route used for the June shipment while the Class B Shipment (expected in late August or early September) will go from PBS to the Ohio Turnpike and then onto the licensed disposal facility in Barnwell, SC.

Keith also described the safety measures and extensive monitoring that will occur throughout pre-decommissioning. The waste containers will be monitored for radioactivity before loading on the trucks and the entire truck monitored before leaving PBS. Monitoring will cover both loose contamination and direct radiation levels, ensuring that it's safe for the material to leave PBS. The truck and its driver will also be monitored.

In response to questions asked by a member of the public in attendance, Tim Polich said that beryllium reflector plates will be “fully encapsulated,” before shipping, adding that the type of beryllium at PBS is different from the beryllium oxide that is associated with health concerns. Workgroup member Rick Graham asked if NASA had an inventory of materials inside the Reactor Facility. Tim assured him that this was the case, noting studies that had been conducted in 1978 and 1985. Keith added that NASA also has more than 3,000 drawings of the facility and had interviewed Reactor Facility retirees for further inventory information.

A member of the public asked about the impact the widening of US 250 will have on the shipments. Keith noted that this summer's work will be done north of the Fox and Scheid Road gates, thus minimizing the potential impact. He also promised that shipments will not take place during “a Saturday morning traffic jam,” saying instead that shipments are likely to take place at times of low traffic levels or at night. The decision on which gate to use has been coordinated with local and County officials, who will be given two week's notice and will be informed again, right before the waste is shipped.

Susan Santos described a number of steps that are being taken to inform the public about pre-decommissioning activities, including a letter and flyer for all PBS “near neighbors,” defined as those living within approximately 1-1.5 miles of PBS. NASA is also planning to install a telephone call-in line dedicated to providing information updates and receiving caller questions. Susan also emphasized the important role of Workgroup members in helping “to get the word out,” and asked members if their neighbors or constituents ask them questions about decommissioning. Janet Bohne said she gets questions but added “when people ask me if I'm concerned about (decommissioning)....I say no, and they say okay.” Workgroup member Ethel Roldan predicted that public questions would increase “once people see the trucks.”

Susan asked Workgroup members to encourage community members to voice their concerns to them and to let NASA know if there are concerns that need to be addressed.

Workgroup member Dave Stein asked if NASA would issue a press release once a pre-decommissioning shipment was readied but Susan said no, explaining that to do so might lead people to believe that the actual decommissioning has begun. She reiterated the other mechanisms NASA will use to inform the public (letter to neighbors, call-in line, etc.). She also pointed out that Sally Harrington has had frequent contact with local media outlets and the media is always invited to Workgroup meetings. She noted that NASA is planning a media briefing and will issue press releases once decommissioning starts. Dave asked if public questions the Workgroup receives should be referred to Sally and Susan said “yes.” Another member of the public observed that some information on the Decommissioning Website was out of date. Susan thanked him for pointing this out and noted that NASA has “been good about (providing updated information to) the Community Information Bank...but not as good about the website.” She promised that it would be updated soon and encouraged Workgroup members to “always ask and remind us,” to update information.

Radiation Monitoring

Next, Keith Peecook gave a presentation (which was handed out) on NASA’s Radiation Monitoring Plan. He stressed that monitoring “is a vital part of our safety plans and procedures,” to protect the public, decommissioning workers and the environment. Keith described the plans for radiation monitoring in areas within the Reactor Facility while work is progressing. All workers will pass through a pair of monitors and their hand-held equipment (tools, lunchboxes, etc.) will also be monitored. In addition, all personnel will be equipped with “film badges” to measure both monthly and cumulative radiation doses. Air monitoring will take place at the facility fence line with water and sediment monitoring upstream and downstream of the site.

Keith explained that NASA has been taking air samples since 1973 to monitor for any release from the site – and pointed out that “nothing above the limits” has been detected since that time. Further, he said NASA will begin continuous environmental air monitoring in the next month to “establish a baseline...what the background level for the air is before we start doing any decommissioning work.” Monitoring will take place both inside and outside the Reactor Facility fence line, with four monitors set up at the fence line (to the north, south, east and west) and two at a distance – one half mile away – at the garage/maintenance facility to the south and the Perkins Schools bus barn to the east. He also explained that worker monitoring and the air sampling will “dovetail” such that “if we find something from the worker monitoring, we will immediately check the air monitoring...to see if any (radiation) made it to the fence line.” Further, he said the air monitors will be equipped with a dosimeter “to give us a record of direct radiation at the fence line – if there is any.”

Workgroup member Bob Speers asked if NASA was conducting instantaneous air monitoring outside the Reactor Facility. Keith responded, no, stating that because the levels are likely to be so low at the fence line that “you’d have to draw a week’s worth of samples just to see what (radiation level) you had.” He added that air sample results will

be furnished once a week. He also pointed out that if there were levels within the Reactor Facility that were higher than expected, NASA could then analyze results simultaneously at the fence line to ensure that nothing above background – or above any level of concern – was going off-site. Tim provided additional input, explaining “we’d never expect to see any (radiation level) at any of the fence (monitoring) sites,” adding that the fence line monitoring is intended “to reassure the public” that there is not a concern. Keith pointed out that the Decommissioning Plan, has a section on accident analysis and noted, that even for the “worst-case” scenario, the worst levels (of radiation) we could see at the fence line are very low,” with Tim adding “a fraction of a millirem.”

Keith also noted that silt (sediment) and water sampling has been going on quarterly since 1973, with “nothing above release levels...basically background.” Monitoring will be increased to monthly. An outside laboratory will be used to analyze results and summaries of the data will be made available to the public. Workgroup member Dave Stein asked if the increased monitoring would occur during pre-decommissioning and was assured it will be. Keith pointed out that water monitoring has already started and that air monitoring will start in May.

Based on the questions raised by Dave and Bob, Susan asked whether the question is “are you guys sampling enough?” She reiterated NASA’s plan for greater monitoring in areas where work was occurring and for workers - which is where the highest radiation levels would be expected. Those levels will be strictly monitored to ensure that they do not pose a health concern. Susan added that NASA “monitors outside the facility and going out further...is the ultimate protection,” to ensure that no level above background is going off-site.

Environmental Update

In Mike Blotzer’s brief presentation on environmental issues, he noted that a federal hiring freeze has delayed hiring an on-site Environmental Manager at PBS, but hoped a person would be able to start by the end of May. Mike mentioned that NASA had a temporary person in the position (SAIC’s Mike Quintin, who had been introduced earlier in the meeting). He noted that there were no public comments received on NASA’s Environmental Assessment (EA) on the decommissioning (described at the January Workgroup meeting). NASA’s conclusion on the EA was a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), which was advertised on April 5 in five area newspapers. The public comment period on the FONSI is ongoing until May 20.

Next, Mike talked about the Environmental Baseline Survey, describing it a comprehensive review of environmental conditions” at the Reactor Facility. The review includes past and current use of the land, both within the fence line and one-half mile beyond, identifies existing environmental conditions of the property and takes into account areas (“data gaps”) where more information is needed. Mike cited several “data gaps” that NASA was currently working on. (Copies of his presentation materials were distributed to Workgroup members.)

Finally, Mike discussed NASA's Environmental Management Plan, noting that it is part of the Decommissioning Operations Plan and describing it as a "road map" for the decommissioning project's environmental requirements. He also said that while the Reactor Facility is not of national historic value, it is NASA's only test reactor facility and, as such, NASA wants his office to preserve the facility's artifacts and history. Susan noted that copies of the Environmental Management Plan, Baseline Survey and historical Artifact Inventory will be placed in the Community Information Bank and on the website.

Community Outreach

Sally Harrington gave a brief update on NASA's community relations activities, which have included completion of an Addendum to the Community Relations Plan (completed in 1999). The Addendum includes updated demographic and near neighbor information as well as an update on community relations activities taking place between July 1999 and January 2001. Sally also mentioned the mass mailing of the NASA postcard magnet in February and asked Workgroup members if they recalled receiving it - and to ask their neighbors if they received it.

Next Meeting

The Workgroup agreed that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday, July 24 at 7 PM with the location to be determined. Perkins High School was suggested as a possible location. Topics will include Pre-Decommissioning and a Decommissioning Update. The Workgroup also agreed to a meeting on Tuesday, October 23 - possibly at BGSU Firelands - with the meeting to be followed by a Community Information Session. Dave Stein asked if other suggested meeting topics could be sent to Sally and she agreed, with Susan encouraging Workgroup members to provide NASA with questions and comments.

The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.